

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, January 19, 1786, from Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson

New York, Jany. 19, 1786.

Dear Sir

My last advis'd you of my departure hence on the 24th of August last for the westwd. With the intention to take a view of the Indian treaty to be held at the mouth of the big Miami, and of the country lying between lake Erie, and the head waters of the James or Potomk, rivers, with those wh. empty from either side into the Ohio. Thence to attend the federal court on the 15th of Novr. At Wmsburg, but the danger from the Indians made in imprudent for me to pass the river, and the delay at fort Pitt, and upon the Ohio, the water being low, consum'd so much of the time allotted for this excursion, that I was forc'd to leave the Commissrs. at limestone and take my course directly thro' the Kentucky settlements & the wilderness to Richmond, so that I was neither gratified with a view of the treaty, or to such a degree with that of the country as I had propos'd. I arrived at Richmond on the 14th of Novr. & found there letters for me from agents of the two States with advice that the session of the ct. had been deferr'd. I therefore prepar'd as soon as possible to sit out for this place & arriv'd on the 18 of Decr. I found in Virginia & in this town letters from your of 17 of June, the 5 & 12 of July, & have had the pleasure to receive that addressed by Mr. franklin of the 4th from himself. He was here a few days since upon some private business & was so kind as to favor me frequently with his company. I have also been much pleas'd with an acquaintance with Mr. Otto. He hath made an impression here very flattering to

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himself & favorable to the idea you entertain of him. It hath been matter of great surprise & concern here that the dispatches respecting the barbary powers shod. have been so long in reaching you. *This Mr. Lam-*

-be was presented to some of the gentlemen in Congress, by the late president Huntington. At that time it was propos'd, & for wh. purpose a report was brought in to carry on these treaties immediately from the U.S. & to appoint the persons & despatch them hence to fit out the Alliance, load her with naval stores & present her to the Emperor. By this procedure it was presum'd we might, by telling these Powers that we ere as yet unacquainted with them or their wants, succeed better than even under the mediation of France. And the secretary of foreign affairs having reported that this man was fit for the negotiation the comrs. advised that he be employed, but it was rejected. We have since heard that he was from his station in life & probable talents, by no means worthy such a trust. We have lately heard from Mr. Adams that Mr. Barclay with Frankes are sent to the Emperor & that Mr. Lambe & a Mr. Randall to Algiers. These pirates have already made a great impression upon our trade and unless these negocens. Prove successful will materially injure it. I am happy to receive yr. sentiments upon the subject of commercial treaties & will with pleasure communicate mine to you more fully than I heretofore have done. With great propriety you have in the first instance taken up with reference to the powers of Congress, for upon those does the whole depend, and I intirely agree with you that they have no original inherent jurisdiction over the commerce of the states, and that it commences & can be exercis'd only by treaties with other nations; how then will this circumstance affect us? When we propose to them to form treaties they will enquire do we labor under any inconveniences wh. thereby we can remove; they will examine their situation in our ports to ascertain whether treaties can obtain, fairer or more equal terms to them, are these temporary or so founded in the nature of their government that they will be perpetual? If then it shall appear that we can give them nothing they do not at present enjoy, and that we cannot deprive them of these advantages, I think it will follow they will

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lay themselves under no restriction it wou'd. not otherwise be their interest to do. To obtain *reciprocal advantage* then cannot possi-

-bly *be the object with other powers in treating* with us, for more than *this they now possess*. But nations are often benefited as much by obtaining *restrictions upon others* in the *ports* of a particular one *which* do not apply *to themselves*, as by particular stipulations in *their own favor*. As upon this principle *treaties* are *some times* form'd as was the case in that between *Britain & Portugal*. How stand *the powers of the Union* and how *their interests* with respect to a *treaty* of this kind? For instance can they *stipulate with France that British goods shall pay ten per cent higher duties here than those of France in consideration for a free trade with her islands*. *This certainly does not come within the provisos* contain'd in the *Confedn*. And is of course within the *powers* of Congress nor have I any doubt of its expedience, if it cou'd. be obtain'd. *Treaties* of this kind wou'd. be more favorable to us and successful, as to the particular objects it might seek, than an entire *prohibition of commerce* with *the powers* with *whom* we have none. By seeking this *power* it wou'd. seem as if we were satisfied with our situation with those *with whom we have treaties* that those with whome we have not *were culprit nations* & that we wou'd. exercise it immediately on them. If then we are dissatisfied with our *treaties with France & the Netherlands* this right of *prohibition* can never avail us with respect to them. And if its exercise upon other *powers* it may give a dangerous shock to our *commerce* & a *monopoly of it to other powers*. And if holding *the power* we proceeded wisely with it & endeavor'd to turn it to the best acct. we cou'd. and to make it a condition with France that we wou'd. put it in force against her for such or such other considerations, yet cou'd. we not obtain the same ends for less expence; for instance for the imposition of *ten per cent* upon her commerce. Every expedient is unquestionably inferior to the complete & absolute controul *over commerce* in *the hands of the U.S.* But this *plan of a treaty* appears to me to be a better succedaneum for the defect than any other I have heard, since it creates the restriction we wd. wish to effect *upon the offending nation* and brings us at the same time upon *the ocean as a commercial people*. *They might be of short duration*. Those *treaties*

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wh. stipulate to each other *the rights of the most favoured nation* obtain none of these ends and appear to me to fetter us as to the powers with whom

they are made. It fetters us as to the imposition of *higher duties* on them than we impose on *others* or subjects us to a variance, while it admits on their part of a constant deviation from the spirit of *the treaty* by the explication wh. it authorizes them to make of *the compensation*. Nothing hath been done on this subject since my last. In my next I may add something further on it. The *commission* will *expire* soon but as an other may be given or instructions form'd respecting it. I beg you to give me further yr. sentiments on it. My several routs westwd. With the knowledge of the country I have thereby obtain'd, have impress'd me fully with a conviction of the impolicy of our measures respecting it. I speak not in this instance of the ordinance for the survey and disposal of it., but of those wh. became necessary & were founded upon the act of cession from the State of Virga. I am clearly of opinion that to many of the most important objects of a federal government their interests, if not oppos'd will be but little connected with outs'; instead of weakening theirs & making it subservient to our purposes we have given it all the possible strength we cod. weaken it we might also and at the same time (I mean reducing the number of the States) render them substantial service. A great part of the territory is miserably poor, especially that near lakes Michigan & Erie & that upon the Mississippi & the Illinois consists of extensive plains wh. have not had from appearances & will not have a single bush on them, for ages. The districts therefore within wh. these fall will perhaps never contain a sufficient number of Inhabitants to entitle them to membership in the confederacy, and in the mean time, the people who may settle within them will be gov'd. by the resolutions of Congress in wh. they will not be represented. In many instances I observ'd above, their interests will be oppos'd to ours. I will mention one wh. arises from their relative situation to other powers. Their eastern frontiers will be covd. from the nations of Europe by the 13 old States, & I may say that

their Northern & Southern, also will, for no power will march an army to attack them by the Mississippi or St. Lawrence without making a powerful impression on these States at

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the same time, or indeed after subduing them; In all questions in wh. we were parties, the attack wou. be on us; upon us therefore wou. the burden & event of the contest depend, & we must be parties in all cases while they are of the Confederacy. The tendency wh. at present prevails for a dismemberment of the old States not only increases their strength but will also add to the diversity of interest. At the instance of which of the states hath the right to the navigation of the Mississippi been carried thus far, and *if you lop off the western parts of those states by whom it was brought about* will you not necessarily withdraw them *from that pursuit*? Whatever shall be done or attempted on this subject I will transmit you. The subject of the mint was taken up last summer & determin'd that the unit shou. be a dolr. It was afterwards postpon'd. It will be taken up agn. so soon as we have 9 or ten States (for at present we have but 7). The proposition for recommending it to the states to vest the U. S. to regulate their trade is still before Congress. What will be its fate is uncertain.. Accept my acknowledgements for yr. book wh. I have read with great pleasure & improvement & be assur'd I will keep it as private as you might wish, until you shall consent to its publication wh. I hope will be the case. I shou. suppose the observations you have made on the subject you

allude to wou. have a very favorable effect, since no consideration wou. induce them but a love for the rights of man & for your country. Whether I shall be able to visit you is still doubtful. My dependence is almost altogether on the bar-by my late absence I have left the door open to others, the sooner I therefore return to it the better is will be for me. I feel myself returning to the same train of thoughts upon this subject as when I had finish'd my studies. I am thinking of settling at Richmond, building an house, &c. Will you be so kind as transmit me a plan-suppose the house when finish'd to cost 3 or 4000 dolrs. (a part to be finish'd only at first). I shall I believe commence it as soon as I receive it. Be assur'd I will attend to those circumstances wh. you mention of a private nature so soon as we shall have a sufficient number of States to do it with effect. This must be shortly. If I shall have time before the packet sails, I shall write mr. Short, if however I shou. fail you will make my apology. Of the death of our worthy friend Mr. Hardy you have heard. He had been

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indisposed of a bilious complaint wh. had been badly cur'd & weaken'd thereby his system to such a degree as to have fail'd under the fatigue of a ride to Kings bridge. A vein broke or some vessel within him-wh. ultimately carried him off. His loss to me is considerable not only as a person with whom I shod. been happy to have liv'd in intimacy hereafter, but in the delegation, more especially as I am unacquainted with those added to it, Colo. Carr-

-ington & Henry Lee of the horse. Mr. Gerry is lately married to a Miss Thomson of this city-a polite and amiable woman abt. 22 years of age. I am with my best wishes for yr. health & happiness yr. affectionate friend & servant Jas. Monroe

RC (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress). Words in italics were written in cipher by Monroe.